

December 29, 2017

Rio Grande National Forest  
Forest Plan Revision  
1803 W. Highway 160  
Monte Vista, CO 81144  
email address: rgnf\_forest\_plan@fs.fed.us

To Whom It May Concern:

As an Colorado native and avid hunter/angler and frequent user of our public lands including the Rio Grande National Forest I (RGNF) I am writing to strongly urge:

1. The Spruce Hole/Osler/Toltec Connectivity Special Interest Area be protected as a special use area in Alternative D of the draft plan. It is critical that this area be protected to provide for connectivity between southern Colorado and northern New Mexico and to protect migration corridors that big game animals depend on. Additionally, I also support the Elk and Deer Wintering Range Management Area 5.41 because of its importance as an elk migration route between summer and winter ranges.
2. Additional attention be given to Bighorn sheep (our state mammal) in the RGNF. Of concern is why Bighorns are not included as a science-based "species of conservation concern." It appears that the RGNF is relying upon the health of one herd (the Sangre de Cristo herd) to determine that there is no substantial concern about the Bighorn sheep in the RGNF. However, the Trickle Mountain herd population as well as others have declined significantly. I request you to take another look at the overall health of these herds and develop management strategies to improve their habitat and populations.
3. As to the fish resource, my support of Alternative D also is based on the need for all partners including the US Forest Service to protect our Rio Grande cutthroat trout. Both the Jim Creek and Carnero Creek Special Interest Areas are important to the conservation of this species.

Beyond these species and areas, it is very important that fragmentation of wildlife habitat be avoided and/or minimized. Colorado 's population is projected to increase from 5.5 million to 8.3 million by the year 2050. As even more people seek to enjoy the RGNF during the coming years, wildlife habitats must be protected now, including but not limited to: removal of obsolete and unnecessary fencing; decommissioning and revegetating roads that are no longer in use or needed; and, making a priority of educating and enforcing the use of ATVs in staying on authorized trails for all purposes including game retrieval.

Sincerely,

Bob Meulengracht  
Lakewood, Colorado